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My Note Book.



HE ridiculous way in which scene-painters habitually outrage the laws of possibility was curiously exemplified at Wallack's Theatre on the first night of the representation of George Fawcett Rowe's picturesque play, "Wolfert's Roost." There was a front scene—the exterior of a house—with a window, *made*

to open, brilliantly painted to convey the idea of a blazing fire and flaring lights within. The windows looked well enough until the villain of the piece half opened the window, and then the phenomenal

effect was produced of pitchy darkness behind the opened half of the window and a brilliant light on the other half. I understand that, with the subsequent condensing of the play, the "front scene" has been dispensed with altogether; but not on account of the phenomenal window, which it seems no one connected with the theatre particularly noticed.

In a few weeks the art dealers who have been spending the summer in Europe will return with many canvases for sale, which will be duly exhibited and sold as the works of eminent artists. The wise amateur buyer, before parting with his money, will do well to satisfy himself that these pictures were painted *entirely* by the artists whose names they bear; for it has become a favorite device with some dealers—and I regret to say that they are among those most trusted by buyers—to purchase for a trifle signed sketches from painters of renown and have them filled in by artists in this city, some of whom are quite expert in imitating the styles of foreign masters.

I have it on excellent authority that a cabinet picture sold not long ago in New York by a dealer as a genuine Vibert, was only sketched by that painter. My informant assures me that he saw the painting being filled in by an artist whose name he has given me. If this paragraph should be read by the victim of the imposition, by calling at the office of THE ART AMATEUR, he can get all the facts in my possession relating to the matter.

An American present in Paris last year at the sale of Lambinet's effects, tells me that a well-known Broadway picture-dealer bought a score or more rough sketches by that artist, and some of them have since been filled in as complete pictures and offered for sale in this dealer's picture gallery.

By the way, it may interest connoisseurs in this country who have paid their hundreds of dollars for inferior works by this artist, to know that at the sale I speak of the best and largest picture of Lambinet was bought for 1950 francs—say, \$400.

As an example of the enormous profits made by American dealers by the sale of European pictures, I may mention that while a mere sketch by Billet—a canvas about 10 x 14—brought last season in New York \$1300, the price obtained for his big picture in the salon—the size was about 18 x 24—was not more than \$200.

Speaking of the practice of American dealers of buying unfinished pictures by eminent French artists, and having them completed in this country, before putting them in the market, it may be added that in many cases the artists know about the contemplated fraud and wink at it. One would suppose that, inasmuch as several of the most important French pictures of the century

have been bought for private galleries in the United States, these artists would have some respect for our taste in art matters, and some pride in being creditably represented by their works brought to this country. But it is not so. They express the most contemptuous indifference as to what Americans may say or think about them. And when we take into consideration the mean opinion that they are bound to form of our judgment by their contact with our representative picture dealers, this is not surprising. They frequently see their poorest works most highly commended by our press and bringing in the market preposterously high prices.

The American dealer calls at the studio of Monsieur Chose, let us say, and finds him hard at work. "Got any thing for sale?" he asks. "No. Every thing sold," says Monsieur, hardly taking his eyes from his easel. "What's this?" asks the dealer, looking at a rough, unfinished sketch which had been turned with its face to the wall. "Nothing. That's no good." "What will you take for it?" asks the dealer. "What do you want to do with it?" asks the artist. "Want it for the New York market. I will give you five hundred francs for it, if you will put your name to it." "That's a bargain," says Monsieur Chose. He puts his name to it and receives his money. The dealer brings the canvas to New York, pays some young painter of talent, say, a hundred dollars, to finish the picture in imitation of the artist's style. The picture is duly puffed and finally goes into the private gallery of Mr. Shoddy as the chef d'œuvre of that great French artist Monsieur Chose.

Sometimes Mr. Shoddy may be so fortunate as to get a *duplicate* of an important picture for twice the price paid for the original, which perhaps has been quietly bought for some nobleman's private collection, which, it is safe to say, Mr. Shoddy will never see. It is a frequent practice with French artists of reputation to repeat their pictures at the bidding of the dealers. A friend of mine who was in Paris last year had been particularly attracted at the salon by a painting with the title "Alone at Last"—or something equivalent to those words in French—and on going from that place to Goupil's gallery, he saw there what seemed to be the identical picture. "Why!" he exclaimed, "I just saw that picture at the Salon!" "Quite impossible," said the gentleman in charge of the gallery, with a sly wink; "don't you see it is here?"

I am moved to suggest to those persons who insist upon calling this publication THE ART AMATEUR, that there is a decided difference between a mature artist and an amateur artist.

Those who may imagine that the ways of an operatic manager or conductor are ways of pleasantness, or his paths those of peace, are invited to read the following, clipped from a London paper. It is one of hundreds of examples that might be collected on this subject: "The tenor Masini (lately with Mapleson) seems to be a modest and unassuming creature. A correspondent writes that after his arrival he took offense because the director would not promise him the monopoly of the various parts in his repertory. But the last straw was when Sir Michael Costa, after waiting for him for rehearsal half an hour, received a message by the call-boy that Signor Masini, as the friend of Verdi, was not accustomed to go to the theatre to rehearse, but expected the conductor to come to his hotel. After a characteristic reply from Sir Michael Costa, Signor Masini arrived at the conclusion that oil and water would not mix, and I believe he has now left the country. He is certainly no very great loss, but the anecdote will show what a desirable sort of person for a small tea-party is an Italian operatic tenor."

A painting just completed by Mr. Edward Moran and sent to the St. Louis Exhibition to be held late in September, is likely to attract a great deal of attention. It is Notre Dame by moonlight, on a fête night, as seen from the Seine. The view was taken from the quay, last summer during the Fête aux Etrangers, when the city was very brilliantly illuminated. The lofty towers of Notre Dame stand out in gloomy grandeur against the heavens, obscuring the moon, whose reflection, however, affords sufficient light, and, falling in silvery ripples on

the water in the foreground, discovers on the quay a throng of spectators looking at the illuminations in the distance. The garish colored fires on the bridge in the background offer a contrast to the soft light from the open doors of the cathedral; and all combined enhance the calm grandeur of the all-pervading moonlight. The picture, with its well-defined lights and shadows, I think, would engrave well. Apart from the artistic merits of the work, it is interesting as the first representation of Notre Dame from the Seine; this point of view only having been made possible of late through the removal of the shanties and rookeries which for ages have obstructed it.

A painting by Swain Gifford, I hear, is to be the subject of an important etching in the forthcoming Boston art journal.

The vandalism of the Commune in Paris left no more enduring mark than the destruction of the sculptural decorations of the Hôtel de Ville. I visited Paris soon afterward, and remember how, driving past the building with an English lady who had many times before stopped to admire its beauties, she held her parasol before her face and told the "cocher" to drive quickly, as she could not bear to look upon the ruins. Many tourists must have had a similar feeling. But from all accounts, the new sculptural decorations, which are being carried forward on a most magnificent scale, will fully equal in excellence those they replace. The city of Paris has just voted 420,600 francs for the year 1879, for the supply of 106 of the statues that are to adorn the principal façade. The total number of these works, including bas-reliefs and figures in the round, amounts to 365 subjects, and it is reckoned that they will cost not less than 1,191,500 francs.

If I remember aright, the Vandals who were instrumental in destroying the Colonne Vendôme were made to pay for its restoration. It is to be hoped that it may be feasible to exact a similar penalty from those who caused the ruin of the Hôtel de Ville.

Sometimes there is something in a name. That of Scribner, the publisher, for example, is probably a corruption of Scrivener, or bookseller. A quaint portrait of "Ye Scribner," from a mediæval cut, is given in the article "Signs and Symbols" in the current number of Scribner's magazine.

A curious lawsuit will soon come into the New York courts, growing out of one of the many frauds at picture auction sales, which have of late made the business notorious. Last spring, the owner of an alleged Salvator Rosa, sent two agents to the auction room where it was advertised to be sold, to bid against each other. They ran it up to \$1800, at which price it was knocked down to one of them. Mr. Matthews, the auctioneer, knew nothing of the fraud until he asked for a deposit and was told that there had been no sale. He then claimed his commission on the \$1800, which, being refused, he refused to part with the picture. It is to recover the latter that the owner brings his suit.

In the same way, a trifling sketch by Corot, done in his early youth, and not worth \$5, was run up to \$500. There was no sale, and perhaps next season we shall have the attempted fraud repeated.

It is a pity that one cannot punish the coarse-grained clown who is ever ready to sacrifice decency for the sake of advertising his wares. A pork-packer has recently published as his trade mark the cherubs of Raffaele with heads of sucking pigs in the place of those of the lovely children we all know so well. The comedians Robson and Crane, it may be remembered, set the example by inserting their own portraits in the spaces now occupied by their swinish successors.

There is an art school near Union Square where the curious practice prevails of having evening classes in painting. I wonder how the pupils manage when they try to continue by daylight the work they have begun by gaslight. Better wait until Edison has perfected his electric light.

MONTEZUMA.